

Corps Responds to America's Most Endangered Rivers List

Q: American Rivers has published its annual listing of America's most endangered rivers and, once again, the list contains rivers where the Corps of Engineers is involved. What is your reaction?

A: American Rivers, by publishing its annual list, contributes to public awareness of the need for citizen involvement in sustaining the vitality of America's water resources. While we may disagree with their characterization of the Corps' role in managing our waterways, we applaud the effort to increase public consciousness of the need for environmental stewardship of our water resources.

Q: American Rivers cites rivers that are at "acute peril" rather than those with chronic problems. The Big Sunflower tops the list because of "misbegotten flood control projects". Are the Corps' proposals as awful as American Rivers indicates?

A: There has been misrepresentation about the Yazoo Backwater Project that goes beyond the American Rivers listing. Various reports miss the fact that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has reformulated the old project into a new recommendation that is based on today's best available science and engineering. The new project will protect lives and property from devastating flooding in the Yazoo Backwater area, while simultaneously improving the environment. The project is more critical today than it was six decades ago because of the increased runoff that occurs across the Mississippi River drainage basin. While other flood control measures have improved the quality of life in surrounding areas, this project offers a significant measure of protection to the lower Yazoo area. Frequent flooding affects over 1,000 homes within the 100-year flood plain. In addition, 231,000 acres of agricultural lands are flooded on an average annual basis, disrupting the lives and livelihood of the citizens in the area with floods that last for months. Local citizens speak about the loss of homes, animals, crops, and timber as well as disruption of the basic social fabric of life when floodwaters invade their homes. The affected citizens feel that the Government has not lived up to its promise since project inception in 1941. The Big Sunflower River project, completed in the 1960's provides flood damage reduction from headwater flooding. The project was recently reformulated to provide reforestation of up to 62,500 acres, thus increasing fish and wildlife resources, substantially reducing pesticide levels and markedly improving the environment.

View additional information on the Yazoo Backwater Reformulation at:
http://www.usace.army.mil/cw/hot_topics/ht_2004/yazoo.pdf

Q: What about the Mattaponi River where you are reconsidering a permit for the King River Reservoir proposal?

A: The City of Newport News applied to our Norfolk District for a permit in 1993 to build a reservoir to meet its long-term water supply projections. After the District recommended denial in March 2001, the permit application was elevated to our North Atlantic Division when the Virginia governor requested that the division commander make the decision. After a long and thorough review, the division commander decided the project's purpose and need as submitted by the City of Newport News is valid and the project is the least environmentally damaging practicable alternative to meet the water supply need based on current information. He has concerns about several issues and is requiring the satisfactory completion of three steps before a permit can be issued.

-- First, there must be coordination with all significant parties under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, including resolution of Native American issues.

-- Second, the applicant must submit an updated wetland mitigation plan for review and approval by the Corps.

-- Third, Virginia must determine whether the project is in compliance with its Coastal Zone Management Act.

The examination of these issues is underway.

View additional information on the King William Reservoir Permit Decision at:

<http://www.nad.usace.army.mil/kwr/King-William-Reservoir.htm>

Q: Finally, American Rivers cited the Trinity River flood control project. Your thoughts?

A: Over the last ten years the Corps of Engineers has worked closely with the City of Dallas, the public, environmental groups (both proponents and opponents) and other agencies to develop the Dallas Floodway Extension Project as an acceptable solution to the severe flooding problems along the Trinity River in the downstream, unprotected area south of the Dallas central business district. A project to provide flood protection in this area was authorized by Congress in 1965 but was never implemented. In response to severe flooding in 1989 and 1990, a reevaluation of the uncompleted downstream project began in 1991. From 1991 through 1999, extensive coordination and public involvement with the local sponsor, stakeholders, and the public culminated in the recommended plan. Features of this plan include a chain of wetlands, flood levees protecting both sides of the river, environmental restoration wetlands, acquisition and management of grassland and bottomland forest for environmental mitigation, and recreation features. As allowed by the Principles and Guidelines used in formulating federal water resources projects, the recommended plan goes beyond a single purpose, most economically efficient plan. It incorporates significant improvements that address environmental and social concerns, avoids adverse impacts, and provides for ecosystem restoration. The authorized multi-purpose Dallas Floodway Extension Project satisfies Federal planning objectives, is complete, acceptable, effective and efficient, and solves flooding problems while protecting the Nation's environment. The plan also satisfies the cost effectiveness, social, and environmental criteria important to the City. The Office

of Management and Budget raised concerns about the way the Corps formulated this project in a letter dated October 3, 2001. The Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works responded to the letter on October 26, 2001 reconfirming that the Corps followed the Principles and Guidelines and developed a project that is technically sound, economically justified, environmentally and socially acceptable, and in the Federal interest.

View additional information on the Dallas Floodway Extension Project at:
<http://www.swf.usace.army.mil/pao/dfe/DFEProjectnotes.htm>